

SOME BAPTIST

Whys and Wherefores

“What saith the scripture?”

ROMANS 4:3

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THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

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Some Baptist Whys and Wherefores

WHY JOIN THE CHURCH?

"The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2: 47).

I. *It is Christ's Organization.*—Men may establish useless organizations, but he does not. Christ thought men needed the church. When he speaks, debate ought to end. Human opinion must not carry itself against God's knowledge. The church is Christ's.

1. Because he founded it: "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16: 18).

2. Because he is the head of it: "And he is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1: 18).

3. Because he loved it: "Even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5: 25).

4. Because he exalts it: "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church" (Matt. 18: 17).

5. Because he prophesies its triumph: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 18).

6. Because he increases its membership: "And the Lord added to the church daily" (Acts 2: 47).

II. *Fellowship Is Natural and Inspiring.*—Men have always sought fellowship. They always will. Evil associates with evil and thereby multiplies harm. Good must link itself with good to better learn and promote

goodness. Good men must not be slackers, while evil men organize to defeat them. "The church is for the saved, and membership answers the deep need and cry for discipleship. There is no bondage like the bondage of love, so binding and compelling, so full of satisfaction and joy. When grace has wrought its work, and the heart is rejoicing in new life and hope, the person does not stop to inquire, Why join the church? That was settled when he found the Lord."

III. "*In Union There Is Strength*" for Service.—"My church . . . and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." These lines are being written at a fourth-story window. All day long soldiers are passing to and fro on the street down there, singly, by twos and by threes. I am hardly conscious of their passing. But one day last week this great office structure began to quiver. Then I heard dull thuds below. The same soldiers were passing, but in column formations now, all keeping step, and all going the same way. Woe was to whatever tried to block their progress then. Christ set a bold enterprise for the band which he started. It was to win the world. He told them to cling together, trust him, and keep right on.

WHY NOT ANY CHURCH

"*We ought to obey God rather than men*"
(Acts 5: 29).

After all that men may say, God's Word should determine what church a person should join, and the Word of God must be interpreted by each person for himself.

Sentiment is one of the noblest emotions only when kept in its proper place, but when sentiment suggests that one should join the church of his father, mother, wife or friend, then sentiment is going too far. Social ties are precious in the sight of all, but the church of God is not builded upon social affinities, customs and limitations. The opinions of men and the prestige of any particular church in the community are not worthy to determine membership. In all matters of personal religion the individual soul is competent both to consider and to conclude. And the serious part is that the individual soul will be held responsible for the ultimate decision.

WHY THE BAPTISTS?

“Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4: 16).

The Answer of Origins.—“To be well-born is to enter life with an advantage. Baptists are justly proud of their beginning—the New Testament. They have an ancient and scriptural origin. Certain characters in history are named as founders of various denominations. The Disciples began with Alexander Campbell, the Methodists with John Wesley, the Presbyterians with John Calvin, the Lutherans with Martin Luther, and the Church of England with Henry VIII. Not so with the Baptists. There is no personality this side of Jesus Christ who is a satisfactory explanation of their origin. The New Testament churches were independent, self-governing, demo-

cratic bodies like the Baptist churches of today. We originated, not at the Reformation, not in the Dark Ages, nor in any century after the apostles, but our marching orders are the Commission, the first Baptist church was the church at Jerusalem. Our principles are as old as Christianity, and we acknowledge no founder but Christ."

—MCDANIEL

WHY A REGENERATED MEMBERSHIP?

"Ye Must Be Born Again" (John 3:7).

1. *What Is Regeneration?*—"It is God's turning the soul to himself—conversion being the soul's turning itself to God." Regeneration cannot be bought by gifts to God, neither is it acquired by man's independent efforts after righteousness. It is often difficult for seekers after salvation to recognize these facts. God first acts upon the receptive soul, and then works in us both the desire and the purpose to receive the free grace which he offers. Now, why do we insist upon a membership composed of those who have repented, turned to God and been baptized each for himself?

2. *The Precedent of the First Churches.*—In their execution of the plan of Jesus the apostles organized churches in Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and afterward throughout the Roman Empire. No unregenerated person was entitled to a place in these churches, even though he had Abraham for father, or any other pious ancestry. "Even Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, could not

share in the blessings of the new kingdom without regeneration." Circumcision counted for nothing, and all the rites and ceremonies of the Levitical economy were abolished. John the Baptist preached repentance, and baptized the penitent for the remission of sins. The first church was formed in Jerusalem. Additions were daily made to it, but only of such as were saved. Paul addressed his letter "to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." He addressed another letter "Unto the church of God in Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."

3. *The Plain Teaching of the Scriptures.*—Regeneration before baptism and church membership is a fundamental in the Baptist faith, and is fundamental with us because it is taught in God's Word. What embarrassment we would have if unconverted men, women and children be admitted freely to membership in God's church! God's entrance requirements must determine admission to God's organization. God says, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Again, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life" (John 5:24). And again, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

WHY IMMERSION ONLY

"And they went down both into the water . . . and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38).

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

“And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Mark 1: 9-11).

THE TEACHING OF PAUL

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6: 3-5).

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCHOLARS

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, Baptizo: “An immersion in water.”

Dr. E. P. Gould (Episcopalian), in Commentary on Mark: “The proposition here coincides with the proper meaning of the verb, indicating that the form of the rite was immersion into the stream.”

John Calvin, (Presbyterian), in his Institutes: “That very word baptize, however, signifies to immerse.”

John Wesley (Methodist), in Notes on the New Testament, page 379: “We are buried

with him—alluding to the ancient manner of baptism by immersion.”

Cardinal Gibbons (Catholic), in *“The Faith of Our Fathers,”* says: “For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity, Baptism was usually conferred by immersion; but since the twelfth century the practice of baptism by affusion has prevailed in the Catholic Church, as this manner is attained with less inconvenience than by immersion.”

WHY CLOSE COMMUNION?

“To the law and to the testimony” (Isa. 8: 20).

THE SCRIPTURES

Everywhere teach and assume that baptism precedes the *Lord's Supper*. All denominations agree on this. And, in this sense, all are “Close” communionists. That is to say, they would not commune with those who had not received “baptism.” Baptists agree with other denominations here, but differ with them as to what baptism is.

WHY DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT?

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ” (Rom. 12: 5).

There is the fullest sort of equality in a Baptist church. Baptists have a common religious experience, they are associated as equals in a common cause, and the only tie that binds them is the tie of Christian love. Every church is an independent, self-governing democracy. When a matter of business is under consideration in one of our

churches, every member can speak freely his views. When all discussion is ended, each member can cast his vote in accordance with his own judgment. One vote counts as much as another, and the majority of votes cast determines the will of the church. All members are received and dismissed by the action of the entire church, which expresses his desire by vote.

There is no official position among the Baptists which carries with it the weight of authority. The presidents of Baptist associations and conventions are presiding officers only, and the pastor of a Baptist church has no authority whatever, save that which is gained by the sweet persuasion of a Christly walk among God's freemen. District, state, and national gatherings of Baptists exist for purposes of conference, and to devise plans for propagating the gospel. They never consider questions of doctrine, nor do they enact any laws which can be in any sense binding upon a local church or an individual conscience. We believe that "each one of us shall give account of himself to God," and that in all matters we "ought to obey God rather than man."

Having said this much, it is now time to say we believe that the New Testament teaches the duty of individual and church co-operation in advancing the lines of the King. The basis and methods of such co-operation must be determined, however, by the individual consciences working together in the light of the Word.

“Democracy” is government’s biggest word in the world of today. This is the day that Baptists long have seen and sought.

WHAT MY MEMBERSHIP MEANS—

“*If ye love me, keep my commandments*” (John 14: 15).

My church is not a club, organized for the welfare of the members only. It is a body of baptized believers, banded together for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom. Its spirit is unselfish, and its purpose spiritual. My church, being founded by the Son of God and purchased with his own blood, I regard the humblest place in it as the highest honor and privilege. My membership, I firmly hold, involves the following points:

1. *It Means Praying.* Jesus prayed habitually. “Good soon fades out of the life of the man who ceases to pray.” The early church was a powerful church because it was a prayerful church. “Humaneness plus prayer equals mighty achievements.” I will pray daily.

2. *It Means Paying.* God gave his only begotten Son. Christ gave his life. My church needs my gifts. I need to give. It is one of the Christian graces in which I should grow (2 Cor. 8: 7). It being more blessed to give than to receive, I want to know the greater blessedness (Acts 20, 35). My church covenant holds me to help spread the gospel. Therefore my giving shall be cheerful, regular, and proportionate to my ability (2 Cor. 9: 7; 1 Cor. 16: 2). I will pay.

3. *It Means Plodding.* William Carey, my Baptist forefather and the father of modern missions, said: "I can plod; to this I owe everything." He plodded his way to immortality. I do not ask an easy or conspicuous place. I am willing to toil wherever my Lord may need me. I may not have unusual talent, but I do possess the kind of genius that plods and that counts. I will plod in my study of the Scriptures, learning a little each day. I will plod for the house of God and in the house of God. I will labor with unrelenting industry and with the enthusiasm of patience. I will plod.

4. *It Means Persevering.* I will "hold fast and keep sweet." I will not take offense, climb the mistree, and quit. I will not imitate Bunyan's character, Mr. Shortwind, who began earnestly, but quickly ran out of breath. I have enlisted for life. I recall my Lord's solemn words: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 10: 22). Through his grace I will persevere.—SELECTED.

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

"Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

"That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

“Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Phil. 2: 12-16).

WHY I AM A BAPTIST

“I love the beautiful symbolism of the ordinances of the Baptist churches. I love a baptism that does not have to be argued, defended or explained, but is in itself such a living picture of burial and resurrection that even the blind eye must close itself if it would not see. And I love the creed that is written nowhere save in the New Testament, which allows growth, and the changes which must come with increase of light and stature without periodical revision. Then, I love the simplicity of the Baptist organization. If there wasn't a Baptist church in the world there would, nevertheless, be millions of Baptists in every generation. I love the democratic churches. I even resent the innovation of 'advisory boards' in Baptist churches. And I love the Baptist recognition of the right of 'private judgment,' the liberty of personal opinion. I love the free responsibility of the human soul, standing on a level platform face to face with God, with no shadow of pope, or bishop, or priest, or manmade creed falling between himself and his Master. That's why I am a Baptist.”—ROBERT J. BURDETTE

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